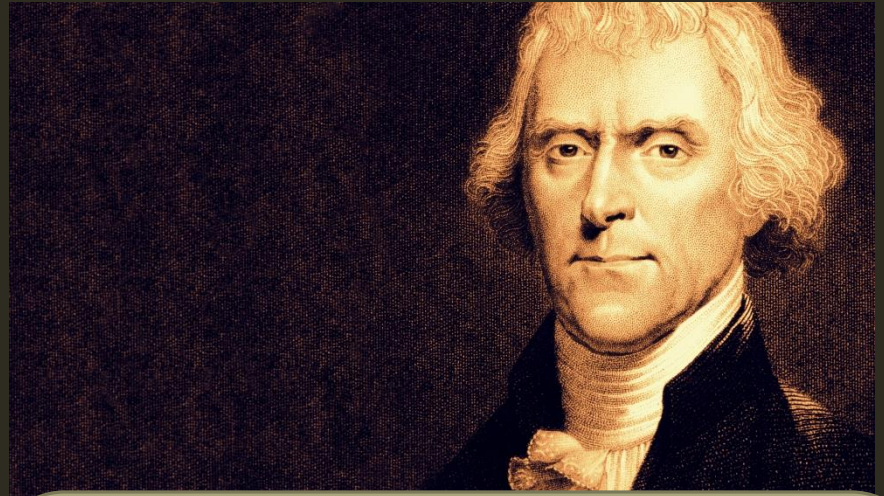


INFLUENCES ON
AMERICAN IDENTITY,
1492 - PRESENT

WHAT MADE –
AND WHAT
MAKES –
AMERICANS SO
AMERICAN?

AMERICAN VALUES AND AMERICAN IDENTITY

In determining the identity of any group, shared values and traditions will play an important role. To some extent, longevity is weighed in – who has lived here the longest. But more important than longevity is the willingness to embrace certain core values over time. Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence is an example of this – a founding document which most Americans immediately recognize as our national creed: an articulate distillation of our beliefs about what it is to be an American.



"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

REINTERPRETING AMERICAN VALUES ACROSS GENERATIONS

Over the years, Americans have re-interpreted the meaning of the Declaration of Independence:

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Seneca Fall Convention produced the Declaration of Sentiments.

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and "a new birth of freedom."

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" Speech.



COMPETING VALUES IN US HISTORY

Liberty VS. Equality

Americans share certain values, and all eight (8) of the values listed to the left are important to our national identity.

Unity VS. Diversity

Yet the valued themselves often come into conflict! Complete liberty and the free competition which comes about because of it cannot guarantee equality; the ability to accumulate private wealth may jeopardize the “commonwealth.”

Private Wealth VS. Commonwealth

We all value the unity of our nation; however, we also value diversity. Non-conformity is as much a value as patriotism.

Law VS. Ethics

We take comfort in law and order; however, what is legal is not always ethical: consider “Jim Crow” laws.

ENGLISH COLONISTS IN NORTH AMERICA

The English came to North America for a variety of reasons, both economic and social. Jamestown, for example was a joint-stock company. Massachusetts Bay Colony, on the other hand, was established to preserve religious freedom from Puritans. By the middle of the 17th Century, though, one thing was certain:

The English came to America to stay – their inhabitants not only spread out along the Eastern Seaboard, but also, the populations of English communities grew rapidly. They encroached upon Native American territory, provoking conflict and warfare.

The English tended to fear Native Americans, and the mistrust prevented them from engaging in serious efforts to convert Indians to their Protestant Christian faiths. (There were some exceptions, like the Quakers.)

Language, common law, political and social traditions, and the strong influence of the Protestant Christian faith are all signs of English influence upon American Identity.

THE PURITANS OF NEW ENGLAND



THE PURITANS OF NEW ENGLAND

The Puritans of New England brought us both a sense of the collective good and the palpable fear of God. Their emphasis on work ethic and community should not be neglected. Yet, they also brought us a sense of paranoia and the Salem Witch Trials...

The Puritans sought religious freedom for themselves, but did not cultivate religious toleration for others. See the Quaker in the picture to the right? She was actually hanged for attempting to proselytize Puritans – tempting them to stray from the one true faith...

The desire to impose strict moral standards on society is something which still defines certain Americans.

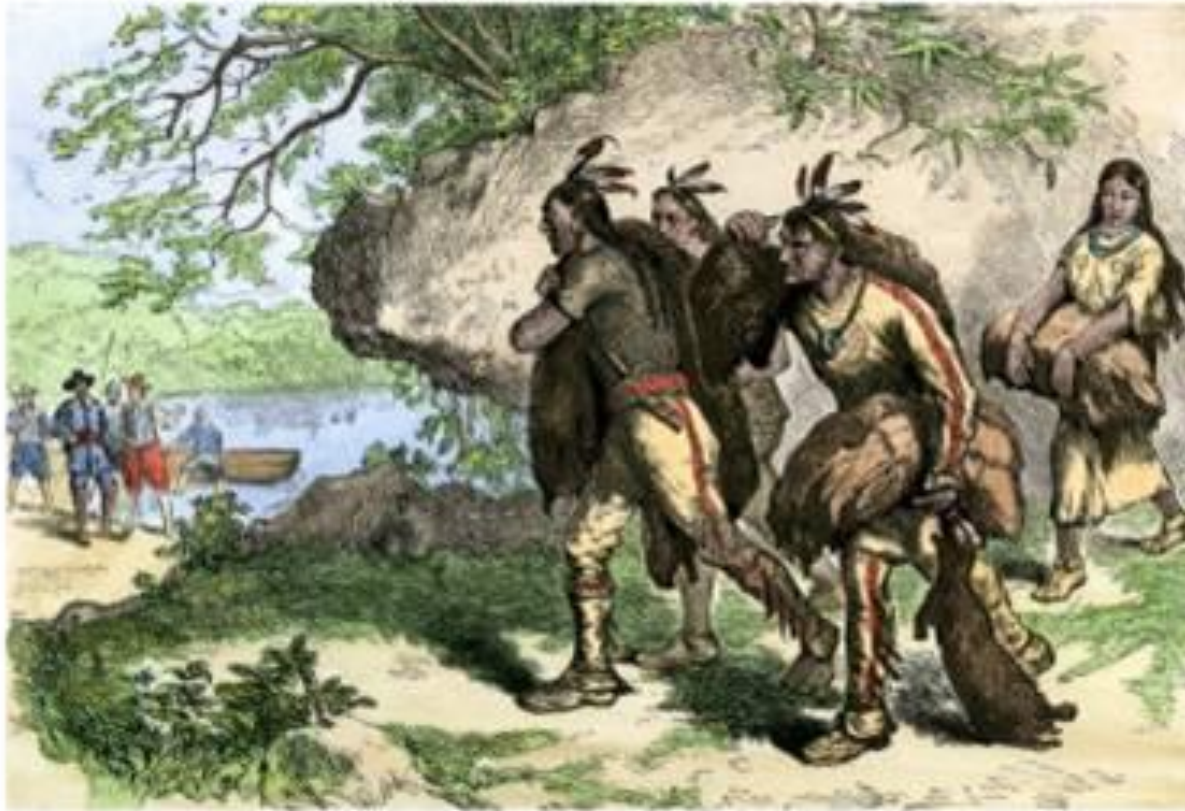


RELIGIOUS DISSENTERS

Individuals like Roger Williams, Anne Hutchinson, and Thomas Hooker were all influential Christian leaders who argued in favor of religious toleration. This was a principle which the Puritans did not embrace, despite their desire for religious freedom for themselves. Nevertheless, the values which Williams, Hutchinson, and Hooker espoused and fought for were later embraced and codified by the likes of Thomas Jefferson – *The Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom* – and James Madison, in First Amendment to the Constitution.



FRENCH COLONISTS



FRENCH COLONISTS IN NORTH AMERICA

The French were principally in North America to trade, and attempted to dominate the fur trade in particular.

French settlements were smaller in number of inhabitants, and therefore were less likely to encroach upon the land and resources of Native Americans. By the 1750s, there were over 1 Million English colonists, and few than 100,000 French settlers.

Although the French were determined to proselytize Native Americans, they did so in a manner which was decidedly tolerant – allowing Native Americans own religious beliefs to be assimilated into the faith, a process known as syncretism.

There were fewer conflicts between the French and Native American communities – recall, the French and Indian War – during which the French and Indians cooperated against the British.

Since the French language does not persist in many portions of the United States, we sometimes undervalue the contribution of the French in settling regions – and developing trade norms – throughout what would become the United States. Moreover, it may be useful to recall that the French helped the United States to establish itself as a nation during the Revolutionary War, and that the nation shares many of our most important values: *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!*

THE SPANISH COLONISTS



SPANISH COLONISTS IN NORTH AMERICA

The Spanish goals in North America may be summarized as “God, Gold, and Glory!” They sought to subjugate the Native American people, convert them to Christianity, enslave them, and pillage their resources... And, they were surprisingly successful at it! But the influence of the Spanish is not as simple as brutality and coercion.

Spanish settlements were relatively small, like the French, and far enough away from the Spanish crown that the governors of the regions had close to absolute power. Converting Native Americans to Catholicism – and the strict interpretations of the Catholic faith which the Spanish advocated – was carried out with brutal force. The Spanish were constantly repressing Native American societies, and therefore had to contend with rebellions – most notably in New Mexico.

Yet, Spanish people chose to create families with Native American communities, introduced new lifestyles, and played a large part in shaping the culture of the regions they ruled over. Americans still see the influence of the Spanish in the widespread use of the Spanish language (Over 40 Million Americans speak Spanish fluently as either a first or second language), Spanish traditions (much of the Cowboy lifestyle), and the presence of the Catholic Church in the Southwest and California over centuries.

THE DUTCH INFLUENCE



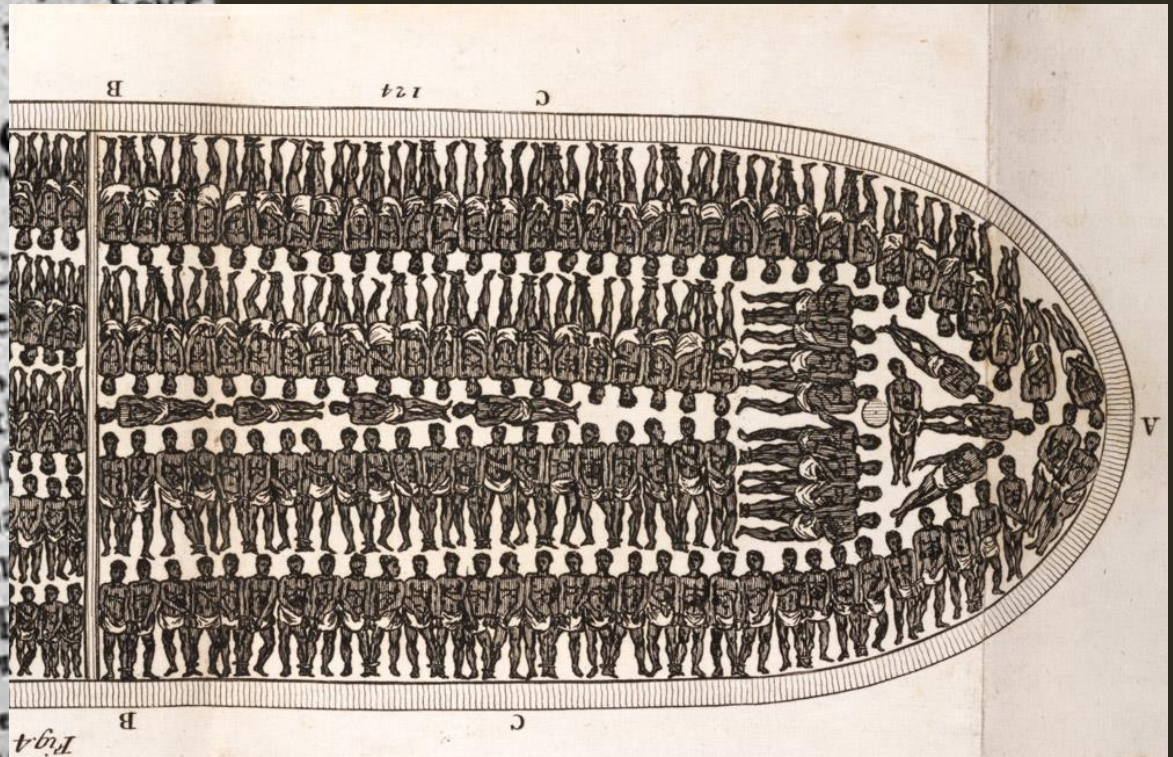
DUTCH INTERACTIONS WITH NATIVE AMERICANS

The Dutch were the most devoted capitalists of the Europeans to come to North America. Indeed, the Netherlands were an empire founded by people who accumulated their wealth selling herring and tulip bulbs globally – they knew how to establish successful commerce! They sought to trade with Native Americans, and would go out of their way to avoid conflicts over land or resources in order to preserve the open channels of trade between themselves and their Native American suppliers. Indeed, many Americans credit the Dutch with instilling in Americans the love of free market, capitalist economic systems which still characterize New York City. And New Amsterdam – that city became New York!

ENSLAVED AFRICANS

TO BE SOLD, on board the
Ship *Bance Island*, on tuesday the 6th
of May next, at *Affley-Ferry*
cargo of about 250 fine
NEGROES
just arrived from
Windward & Rice C
—The utmost care
already been taken,
shall be continued, to keep t
the least danger of being in
SMALL-POX, no boat h
board, and all other comm
people from *Charles-Town*
Austin, Lauren

N. B. Full one Half of the above
SMALL-POX in their own Country.



ENSLAVED AFRICAN-AMERICANS

- ❖ It may be impossible to overstate how crucial African-Americans were in creating the infrastructure of America as we know it today. Moreover, the degree to which American prosperity and wealth was accumulated because of slave labor is often neglected in texts.
- ❖ Southern plantation owners obviously benefitted from the labor of the enslaved; however, many Northern ship owners and traders gained prosperity through the sale of slaves – and via the products of their labor.
- ❖ The Constitution clearly protected and promoted the institution of slavery as it was ratified in 1787. Ending slavery and overcoming the crippling legacy of the slave system has been a central part of the narrative of the United States history.
- ❖ The degree to which the enslaved fought for their own freedom, and the struggles advancing towards equality by the descendants of the enslaved, is a portion of American history which many Americans find inspiring and uplifting – even if that struggle frequently encountered obstacles like discrimination and violent racism.

THE QUAKERS OF PENNSYLVANIA

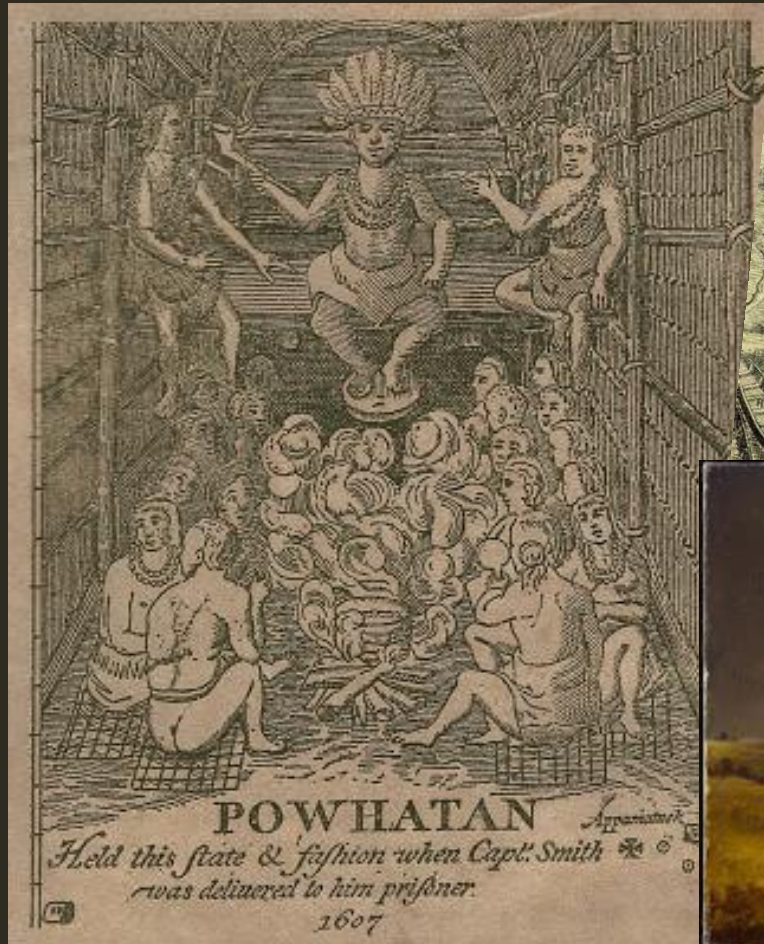


THE INFLUENCE OF THE QUAKER FAITH



Many of the most outspoken reformers in American history were the descendants of Quakers. From abolitionists to suffragists, the Quaker belief in equality and toleration was been promoted. Another feature of the Quaker faith, pacifism, has been somewhat less strictly adhered to...

NATIVE AMERICANS



NATIVE AMERICANS

Since Native American communities are far too diverse to characterize in one generalization, this category is somewhat unfair. But there are several important points we must acknowledge:

1. Native American land and resources were seized by force and via coercion across centuries.
2. To a large extent, Native American cultures have been forced into amalgamation and assimilated towards American customs over time.



Have Americans exploited Native Americans and their resources? Did Americans take on characteristics of Native Americans, or did they define themselves *in opposition* to Native American beliefs? Could Americans have developed a different, mutually beneficial relationship with Native American neighbors?

A LAW
OF
MARYLAND
Concerning
RELIGION.

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

CATHOLIC IMMIGRANTS

When evaluating the role of Catholic immigrants to United States history, it may be helpful to consider these factors:

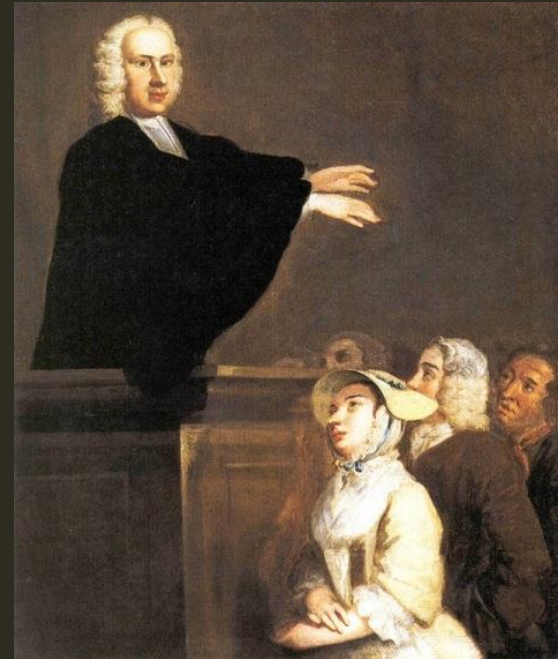
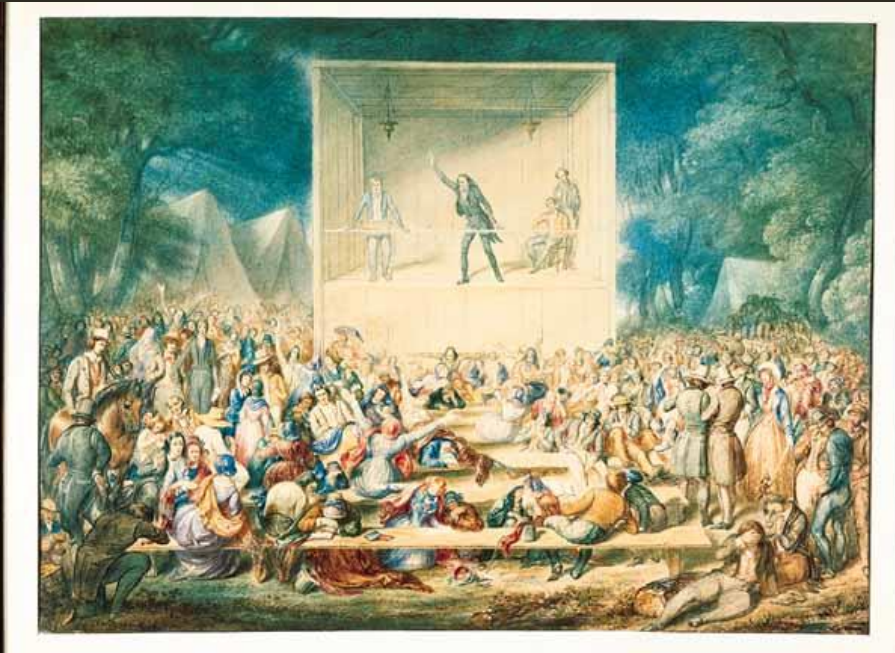
1. Catholics helped to found the colony of Maryland under George Calvert – Lord Baltimore – during the 17th Century. During this period, the Act of Religious Toleration was created.
2. Large waves of Catholic immigrants – coming from Germany and Ireland during the early part of the 19th Century and from Southern and Eastern Europe later in the 19th Century – helped to build America by serving as the backbone of the workforce.
3. Catholics constitute the largest denomination of Christians in the United States – at just over 20% of the population.
4. Catholics have been the targets of discrimination and religious bigotry by groups like the American Protective Association and the KKK over the years. Many of the Founding Fathers mistrusted the Catholic Church, thinking that a democratic republic would be undermined by the rigid hierarchy of the Catholic Church and its followers devout faith in the Pope.

THE PORTUGUESE



Obviously, no territory in the United States was established by the Portuguese – their largest colony lay far to the South in Brazil. However, there were two major contributions of the Portuguese. First, their sailors led the way: Vasco de Gama; Bartolomeo Dias. Secondly, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to engage in the slave trade along the West Coast of Africa, and they perfected the plantation system to raise crops like sugar cane.

“THE GREAT AWAKENING”



THE INFLUENCE OF THE GREAT AWAKENING ON US HISTORY

The Great Awakening resulted in to major developments.

First, the itinerant ministers who led the Great Awakening inspired a huge swelling of Christian fellowship and passion for the Scriptures. By emphasizing that individuals could find salvation if they opened themselves to God and experience a personal transformation, these ministers challenged doctrines of predestination and began the process we know as “the democratization of American Christianity” today.

Secondly, the Great Awakening did something else, which was somewhat unexpected. It allowed congregations to engage in dissent and criticism of their own ministers! And if you can engage in dissent against your minister at church, then speaking out against the mayor – or the governor – or the Parliament – or the far away King of England – is easy!

THE ENLIGHTENMENT RATIONALISTS



ENLIGHTENMENT RATIONALISTS



The 17th and 18th Century belief that people were capable of solving problems that faced humanity by studying nature and using scientific method to produce positive changes emerged from the Enlightenment.

For Americans, the gravest problem of the late 18th Century was the difficulty of producing good governments!

Consider the contributions of these men to American identity:

George Mason: *The Virginia Declaration of Rights*

Thomas Jefferson: *The Declaration of Independence &*

The Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom

James Madison: The Father of the *Constitution* and the *Bill of Rights*

In 1776, Americans created 13 new governments – almost all of which were written by students of the natural law and political philosophy which came out of the Enlightenment.

RUSSIAN COLONISTS



The Russian people sold Alaska to the United States of America in 1867 – for approximately \$7 Million. They had claimed territory as far south as California along the Pacific Coast – but never very convincingly...

Throughout history, but particularly during the Cold War and today, Americans have defined themselves in opposition to the Russian people, who have been ruled over by autocratic monarchs, communist dictators, and vile totalitarian brutes.

ISLAMIC AFRICAN KINGDOMS



Many of the enslaved African people who were wrenched away from their homes and put into bondage by European slavers were initially captured by warring parties in West Africa itself. The role West African people played in the success of the colonies was important. Rice cultivation, for example, was entirely dependent upon slave labor, since Englishmen were not familiar with how to grow the crop.

MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN IDENTITY

ENGLISH COLONISTS

NEW ENGLAND PURITANS

RELIGIOUS DISSENTERS

FRENCH COLONISTS

SPANISH COLONISTS

DUTCH COLONISTS

ENSLAVED AFRICANS

QUAKERS

NATIVE AMERICANS

CATHOLIC IMMIGRANTS

THE PORTUGUESE

RUSSIAN COLONISTS

THE GREAT AWAKENING

ISLAMIC AFRICAN KINGDOMS

ENLIGHTENMENT RATIONALISTS

DIRECTIONS FOR THE ASSIGNMENT

1. Identify the four (4) least significant contributors to American identity.
2. Identify three (3) honorable mentions in the defining of American identity.
3. Rank, in order of importance, the eight (8) most important contributors to American identity on this list. Be prepared to defend your answers in front of the group!
4. Your group must achieve consensus and defend the list you have constructed – presumably through compromise and discussion.

